

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Office of the Spokesman

For Immediate Release

July 23, 2009

2009/768

FACT SHEET

U.S Collaboration with the Lower Mekong Countries
on the Environment, Health and Education

On July 23, the first-ever group meeting of the U.S. Secretary of State and the Foreign Ministers of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam took place in Phuket, Thailand to highlight the increasing cooperation between the United States and the Lower Mekong countries in the areas of the environment, health and education. Some activities currently underway include:

Environment: The U.S. will spend more than \$7 million in 2009 on environmental programs in the Mekong Region. Programs in this area include:

- Development of "Forecast Mekong," a predictive modeling tool to illustrate the impact of climate change and other challenges to the sustainable development of the Mekong River Basin.
- An agreement between the Mekong River Commission and the Mississippi River Commission to pursue a "sister-river" partnership to improve the management of trans-boundary water resources.
- Support for projects that promote the sustainable use of forest and water resources, preserve the tremendous biodiversity of the Mekong Basin, and increase access to safe drinking water.
- The U.S. is seeking Congressional approval for an additional \$15 million in 2010 for assistance related to improving food security in the Mekong countries.

Health: U.S. assistance to the Mekong countries in the health field will total over \$138 million in 2009, and focus on the following areas:

- HIV/AIDS – working in partnership with Mekong countries, ongoing U.S. assistance has contributed to the 50% reduction in HIV/AIDS infection rate in Cambodia, and provided treatment and prevention services to over 2 million people across the region.
- Pandemic influenza – the U.S. has provided \$95 million since 2006 to support ongoing programs in Mekong countries to prepare for, and respond to threats from, outbreaks of pandemic influenza.
- Malaria and tuberculosis – U.S. assistance supports the tracking, identification and treatment of multi-drug resistant malaria and TB in the Mekong region.
- Plans to hold a “U.S.-Mekong Conference on Integrated Approaches to Infectious Disease” in the next 6-9 months.

Education: U.S. assistance in the area of education for 2009 totals \$16 million, including:

- Support for more than 500 student and scholarly exchanges with Mekong countries each year through the Fulbright Program and other educational programs.
- Support for increasing basic education enrollment and expanding broadband Internet connectivity in rural communities.
- Plans to hold a “U.S.-Mekong Forum on the Internet, Education and Development” to promote best practices and regional collaboration on the use of internet connectivity to foster development.